THE NATURE, DESIGN, AND GENERAL RULES OF THE *Methodist Societies*.

ESTABLISHED

By the Rev. JOHN WESLEY.

To which are added,

THE RULES OF THE BAND SOCIETIES.

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RULES of the SOCIETY.

1. IN the latter end of the Year 1739, eight or ten Perſons came to Mr. Weſley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of ſin and earneſtly groaning for Redemption. They deſired (as did two or three more the next day) that he would ſpend ſome time with them in prayer, and adviſe them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they ſaw continually hanging over their heads. That they might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together; which from thenceforward they did every week; viz. on Thurſday in the evening. To theſe, and as many more as deſired to join with them, (for their number increaſed daily) he gave thoſe advices from time to time which he judged moſt needful for them: and they always concluded the meeting with prayer, ſuited to their ſeveral neceſſities.

2 This was the riſe of the METHODIST SOCIETY, firſt in London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than "A company of "perſons, who, having the Form, are ſeeking the "Power of GODLINESS: United, in order to pray "together, to receive the word of exhortation, and "to watch over one another in love, that they may "help each other to work out their Salvation." *

There is only one condition previouſly required of thoſe who requeſt to be admitted into this Society, namely, *A deſire to flee from the wrath to come, to be ſaved from their ſins.* But wherever this is fixed in the ſoul, it will be ſhewn by its fruits. ‡

* "Bear ye one another's burdens, and ſo fulfil the law of Chriſt." Gal. vi. 2. Heb. x. 24. Acts. ii. 24. † Matt. i. 21. ‡ Matt. iii. 8.

That it may the more eaſily be diſcerned, whether the members of the ſociety are working out their Salvation, each ſociety is divided into ſmaller companies, called Claſſes, according to their reſpective places of abode, or as it may ſuit their convenience. There are about twelve perſons, or more, in each claſs; one of whom is ſtiled the Leader.

No perſon is admitted upon trial, till he has met three or four times in a Claſs, and is recommended by a leader, or by a proper perſon, and receives a note from a travelling-preacher, and the rules of the ſociety. Having met two months on trial, and being recommended by the leader, he then receives a Ticket, and is conſidered as a member of the ſociety

Perſons are received into ſociety in large towns, on the Sunday following the quarterly viſitation of the claſſes. The officiating preacher then reads over their names in the ſociety meeting.

A Leader ought to be a perſon of *clear experience, and ſound judgment, truly devoted to God, zealous for the ſalvation of ſouls, of upright converſation, and one who has gifts proper for the work.* He is nominated by the ſuperintendent, at a leader's meeting, and if approved of by a majority of the leaders preſent, is confirmed in that office.

It is the buſineſs of a leader to ſee all the perſons belonging to his claſs *once* a week at leaſt, in order to enquire how their ſouls proſper. Not only how they keep the Rules of the Society, but how they grow in the knowledge and love of GOD. To adviſe, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occaſion may require. To receive w at they are willing to give for the ſupport of the Goſpel. To meet the Preacher and Stewards of the Society once a week, in order to inform the Preacher of any that are ſick; or of any that walk diſorderly, and will not be reproved. To pay to the Stewards what they have received of

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their ſeveral claſſes, and to ſhew their account of what each perſon has contributed.

A Steward of the Society, ought to be *an experienced chriſtian, of upright converſation, and one who can write and keep fair accounts.* He is choſen to his office at a quarterly, or at a leader's meeting. He is then nominated by the ſuperintendent, and if approved of by a majority of the perſons preſent, confirmed in his office for *one year.* And at the end of the year, is either re-elected, or another perſon choſen into his place. But no leader or ſteward can be put out of his place, but by a majority of leaders, or a quarterly-meeting. Neither can any member of the ſociety be excluded but by a majority at a leader's-meeting.

All the members of the ſociety muſt continue to evidence their deſire of Salvation, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, eſpecially that which is moſt generally practiſed. Such as the taking the Name of GOD in vain. The profaning the Day of the LORD, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or ſelling; by employing a barber; by making or going to any feaſt or wake; or by learning the military exerciſe as a volunteer, or by attending to ſee them exerciſe on the Lord's-day.

They muſt avoid drunkenneſs; buying or ſelling ſpirituous liquors, or drinking them, unleſs in caſes of extreme neceſſity. Fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing.* The uſing many words in buying and ſelling: The buying or ſelling uncuſtomed goods. The giving or taking things on uſury, that is, unlawful intereſt.† Uncharitable or unprofitable converſation; all fooliſh talking and jeſting.‡ Evil ſpeaking, particularly of magiſtrates and miniſters, ſeeing that in the oracles of GOD, we are commanded to be ſubject to the

* 1 Pet. iii. 9. † Pſa. xv. 5. ‡ Eph. iv. 29.

higher powers; and that *Honour the King*, is there connected with the *Fear of God.* *

Doing to others as we would not they ſhould do unto us. Doing what we know is not for the Glory of GOD; as the putting on of gold or coſtly apparel; thefollowing the vain and fooliſh cuſtoms or faſhions of the world: †

The taking ſuch diverſions as cannot be uſed in the name of the Lord Jeſus; ſuch as *Dancing*, *Cards*, *Plays*, *Balls*, *or Horſe-races*. None of which can be reconciled to the advice of the Apoſtle. ‡

The ſinging thoſe ſongs, or reading thoſe books, which do not tend to the knowledge and love of GOD. §

Softneſs and needleſs ſelf-indulgence: Laying up treaſures upon earth: Borrowing money without a probability of paying it again; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them. ¶

It is expected of all who continue in the ſociety, that they ſhould continue to evidence their deſire of Salvation, By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity; doing good of every poſſible ſort, and as far as poſſible, to all men. To their bodies, of the ability which GOD giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by viſiting or helping thoſe that are ſick or in priſon. **

* 1 Pet. ii. 17. † "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds," Rom. xii. 2. and 1 Cor. x. 31.

‡ "Redeem the time, becauſe the days are evil." Eph. v. 16.

§ Eph. v. 19. and James v. 13.

¶ "The wicked borroweth and payeth not again." Pſa. xxxvii. 21.

** "To do good and communicate, forget not, for with ſuch ſacrifices GOD is well pleaſed," Heb. xiii. 16. Matt. xxv. 35, &c.

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To their ſouls, by inſtructing, reproving, or exhorting, all we have any intercourſe with. ‖

By doing good, eſpecially to them that are of the houſehold of Faith, or earneſtly deſiring ſo to be; employing them preferably to others. * Buying one of another, helping each other in buſineſs; and ſo much the more, becauſe the world will love its own, and them only. † By all poſſible diligence, frugality, and cleanlineſs, that the Goſpel be not blamed. ‡

By running with patience the race that is ſet before them: Denying themſelves, and taking up their croſs daily: ſubmitting to bear the reproach of Chriſt; to be as the filth and off-ſcouring of the world; and looking that men will ſay all manner of evil of them falſely for the Lord's-ſake. §

It is expected of all who deſire to continue in the Society, that they ſhould continue to evidence their deſire of Salvation, By attending all the ordinances of GOD. ‖ Particularly the miniſtry of the word, where it is preached or expounded in its primitive purity, at all opportunities; carefully, with earneſt prayer to GOD for a bleſſing upon what they hear. ¶

The Supper of the LORD whenever it is adminiſtered, with ſolemn prayer, and deliberate ſelf-devotion. **

‖ "Thou ſhalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy neighbour, and not ſuffer ſin upon him," Levit. xix. 17.

[* Eſpecially barbers who do not follow their buſineſs on the Lord's-day.]

† Rom. x. 12. Heb. xiii. 1.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 3. 1 Cor. x. 23.

§ "Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you, falſely, for my ſake," Matt. v. 11. Heb. 11. 2.

‖ Pſalm xxiv. 4.

¶ "Bleſſed are they that hear the word of the Lord and keep it," Luke xi. 28.

** Luke xxii. 19. 1 Cor. xi. 26.

Family

Family prayer, morning and evening at the leaſt. *

Private prayer alſo, morning and evening, and oftener if opportunity ſerve. †

Searching the Scriptures; by reading ſome part of them every day, carefully, ſeriouſly, and with earneſt prayer for a bleſſing from GOD; and doing this fruitfully, immediately practiſing what they learn. ‡

Faſting or abſtinence, eſpecially on the four quarterly faſts, (viz.) The firſt Friday after New-year's-day, after Lady-day, after Midſummer-day, and after Michaelmas-day. ¶

No member of the Society ſhall marry with an unbeliever, or a perſon who does not fear GOD and walk in his ways. Neither ſhould they take any ſtep towards marriage but in the fear of GOD, with earneſt prayer for direction, and with the advice and approbation of their chriſtian friends. §

To prevent impoſtors from defrauding our brethren; and likewiſe to introduce the real members into all the privileges and fellowſhip to which they have a juſt claim, when obliged to remove into other parts, they are enjoined, to receive a Note of Recommendation from a Travelling-preacher, before their removal.

* "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the families that call not on thy name." Jer. x. 25. and Pſa. lxxix. 9.

† "Enter into thy cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut the door, pray to thy Father who is in ſecret, and thy Father who ſeeth in ſecret, will reward thee openly." Matt. vi. 6.

‡ "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think that ye have eternal life, and they are they which teſtify of me." John v. 39. Col. iii. 16. ¶ Matt. vi. 16.

‖ "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." 2 Cor. vi. 14.

§ "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths." Prov. iii. 6. Heb. xiii. 4.

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The ſuperintendent or ſome travelling-preacher, ſhall, if poſſible, meet the Local-preachers once a quarter; and no one can be admitted as a local-preacher, unleſs he is propoſed and approved of by a majority of that meeting. If this cannot be done in any particular circuit, then they muſt be propoſed and approved of at the quarterly-meeting.

Every local preacher muſt meet in claſs, and conform to all our diſcipline; and none can be excuſed in this reſpect.

In order to preſerve the life and power of Godlineſs among us, the members of the ſociety are deſired, carefully to guard againſt formality in public worſhip. In ſinging the praiſes of God, all the congregation are requeſted to join, [the women are deſired to ſing their part,] to take care not to ſing too ſlow, to uſe no vain repetitions, and to ſing no anthems. The hearers are intreated, ſeriouſly and ſolemnly to join with the preacher in prayer, and to hear the word with the deepeſt attention; taking care not to talk in the chapel when the ſervice is over; but to go quietly and ſilently away, ſo that they may profit by what they have heard.

In order to preſerve our Rules, all the members of the ſociety ſhould conſtantly ſhew their Tickets to the ſteward, or to thoſe perſons who may be appointed for that purpoſe, at the meeting of the ſociety.

No perſon can continue a member of the ſociety who becomes a bankrupt, unleſs it appears, upon examination, that he has acted upright, kept good accounts, and has not been concerned in the baſe practice of raiſing money by coining notes, commonly called the *Bill Trade*.

No perſon who is a truſtee, ſhall be excluded from the ſociety, until his crime or breach of the Rules be proved, in the preſence of the reſt of the truſtees and leaders.

No perſon among us ſhall call another Heretic, Bigot, or any other diſreſpectful name, on any account, for a difference in ſentiment. No

No ſchool-maſter or miſtreſs, ſhall teach dancing, or receive a dancing-maſter into their ſchool; nor ſhould the members of our ſociety ſuffer their children to be taught to dance.

Theſe are the General Rules of our Societies; all which we are taught of GOD to obſerve, even in his written Word, the only Rule and the ſufficient Rule both of our Faith and Practice. And all theſe we know his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who obſerve them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that ſoul, as they that muſt give an account. We will admoniſh him of the error of his ways: We will bear with him for a ſeaſon. But then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own ſouls.

RULES

Of the BAND SOCIETIES,

Drawn up December 25, 1738.

THE deſign of our meeting is, to obey that command of GOD, "*Confeſs your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,*" Jam. v. 16.

The following queſtions ought to be propoſed to every perſon that deſires to be admitted into the Bands.

1. Do you enjoy the knowledge of Salvation by the remiſſion of ſins? (Luke i. 77.) And have you the peace of GOD in your conſcience? (Rom. v. 1.)

2. Have you the love of God ſhed abroad in your heart? (Rom. v. 5.)

3. Have you the Spirit of GOD bearing witneſs with your ſpirit, that you are a child of GOD? (Rom. viii. 16.)

4. Has

4. Has no ſin, inward or outward, dominion over you? (Rom. vi. 14.)

5. Do you deſire to be told of all your faults, and that plainly?

6. Do you deſire that each of us ſhould tell you whatever we think, or fear, or hear concerning you?

7. Do you deſire, that in doing this, we ſhould come as cloſe as poſſible; that we ſhould ſearch your heart to the bottom?

8. Do you deſire, that each of us ſhould tell you from time to time, whatſoever is in his mind concerning you?

9. Is it your deſire and deſign, to be on this and all other occaſions, entirely open, ſo as to ſpeak every thing that is in your heart, without exception, without diſguiſe, and without reſerve?

Our deſign is,

1. To meet once a week, at the leaſt.

2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without ſome extraordinary reaſon.

3. To begin exactly at the hour, with ſinging or prayer.

4. To ſpeak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true ſtate of our ſouls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have been exerciſed with ſince our laſt meeting.

5. To end each meeting with prayer, ſuited to the ſtate of each perſon preſent.

6. To deſire ſome perſon among us to ſpeak his own experience firſt; and then to aſk the reſt in order, as many and as ſearching queſtions as may be, concerning their ſtate, ſins, and temptations. Such as

1. Have you been guilty of any known ſin ſince our laſt meeting?

2. What temptations have you met with?

3. How was you delivered?

4. What have you thought, ſaid, or done, of which you doubt whether it be a ſin or not?

DIREC-

DIRECTIONS given to the BAND SOCIETIES.

YOU are ſuppoſed to have the "Faith that overcometh the world:" To you therefore it is not grievous,

I. Carefully to abſtain from doing evil: in particular, 1. Neither to buy or ſell any thing on the Lord's day.

2. To taſte no ſpirituous-liquors, unleſs preſcribed by a phyſician.

3. To be at a word both in buying and ſelling.

4. Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to ſtop thoſe ſhort that do.

5. To wear no needleſs ornaments, ſuch as rings, ear-rings, necklaces, laces, or ruffles.

6. To uſe no needleſs ſelf-indulgence, ſuch as taking ſnuff, or tobacco, unleſs preſcribed by a phyſician.

II. Zealouſly to maintain good works: in particular, 1. To give alms of ſuch things as you poſſeſs, according to your power.

2. To reprove all that ſin in your ſight, and that in love, and meekneſs of wiſdom.

3. To be patterns of diligence and frugality, of ſelf-denial, and taking up the croſs daily.

III. Conſtantly to attend on all the ordinances of God: In particular,

1. To be at public worſhip, and at the Lord's table every week, if poſſible; and at every public meeting of the Bands.

2. To uſe private prayer every day: And family prayer, if you are the head of a family.

3. To read the ſcriptures, and meditate therein, at every vacant hour. And,

4. To uſe faſting or abſtinence, as often as your health will permit.

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